It feels selfish to start off this writing with the word “I”. Usually I am able to separate from the world’s sorrow and live within myself. But there is so much all the time. How much of my life right now should be considered a joke? Am I allowed to think of myself?

The number of people dying in this country and at the rate that they are dying are statistics that I find I cannot comprehend. Usually I do well with things that are broken into numbers. Percentages and facts I can lay out in front of me and apply to a population. But this amount of death, from the unseen antagonist, is brutal. It is painful. I don’t allow myself to think of all of the people who have died, or their families, or friends, because I think that I would not move for a very long time. I don’t like to think of my friends who are working in hospitals. I wonder if they’re scared, and then I am scared for them. Each day I read the newspaper and look for some hope. Is it sad that hope relies on less people dying? And yet there are still deaths? Thank goodness, I think, that just 300 people have died instead of last week’s 700. Are we built to handle these numbers?

I don’t know what to do. My mom is immunocompromised. It feels dangerous to leave the house for more than a grocery run. Am I selfish to see my friends? How long will this last? And how can I be thinking of myself when so many people are dying everyday, and risking their lives, and dying from this risk? I read an article recently that said something like “how can we ask those to stay home for society when they are the ones that society has forgotten?” How do I help these people? Why am I scared to look for ways to help? My mom told me to look for part-time jobs recently. She only asked one time, in a sort of forceful way, and I assured her that I would. But I can’t. I can’t bring that to our house.

How do I not feel grief all the time? My friends and I social-distance from each other. And we laugh, and we talk, and we drink and just be together. It is a small relief. But am I allowed this relief? Why do I get to have these things when others can’t? Who am I to sit in this room, and type on this computer, and not have overwhelming fear for my life, not only of getting sick but of feeding my family?

Sometimes I’ll be laying in bed, and I’ll just feel an ache between my ribcage. I know it is my anxiety. I haven’t had an attack for a while, but I know where it lives, and I can’t say that it is sleeping right now. Every once in a while it wakes, and locks its self onto my ribs, and pulls them taut, not enough for me to start breathing heavily, but just enough so I know that it’s there. Sometimes I’ll feel like crying. Sometimes I am so happy, usually when I’m with my family, that something wells in my chest and I feel as if I’m going to burst. I am so grateful and thankful for our health and our safety. I am privileged to the nth degree.

Other times I feel like crying because I forget what is happening in the outside world, and then I remember. It feels like I am a pencil that has been dulled from overuse, from ignoring and not feeling everything that is happening everywhere. And then something happens, and I read an article or watch a video or picture someone’s family, and the pencil is sharp, and the writing is fresh, and it burns on the way down.

I feel like crying too when I am frustrated. I am frustrated with how my life is being lived right now. My mom told me that she is okay 99% of the time. But that 1%, when she realizes that my brother and I’s lives have been put on hold, she freaks out. My parents have always asked me what I plan on doing with my life, what my next steps are, where am I going. Those questions fall flat for me now. How can I plan for this life? Where should my next steps take me? Has my path changed for where I am going? And how do I deserve to feel like this? Am I allowed to feel frustrated with what is happening to me?

I cried recently watching an episode of Avatar. The main character was so angry and sad and frustrated, that he went into himself, and almost caused mass destruction. His friend waited, and looked sad, and slowly grabbed him. He fell into her arms and started crying for what he lost. I started crying too. How much have I lost that I don’t realize? Nobody is grabbing me, and pulling me down, and holding me. Can I expect that from others who are going through the same things? How much can I expect from the people in my life during this shared experience? How do we support each other?

Every discussion I have with my friends, and my family, anywhere these conversations take place, always feel to me to be tinged with a sense of un-reality. None of us are supposed to be here. The plans that we are making together should not exist. The happiness that I draw from these interactions is true, and a relief, and a much-need salve. But how long can these things last? The need for normalcy and the need to acknowledge the tremendous amount of death are at such odds with each other.

And my guilt is overwhelming. For not doing anything now, but also for the times before the pandemic when death and inequality were still happening and I was still doing nothing. How do I reconcile the image I have of myself with my actions? How can I claim to care so much about what’s happening now, when I have done nothing in the past?

I left Kingston on March 18th. I have discovered that I usually do well in emergencies. When my parents called me at 10 p.m. on March 17th, and told me that I needed to be packed for noon the next day, I told my housemate what I needed to do and did it. At first I felt some relief. I had been so nervous about my family for about a week, and I was so far from them. I thought often about an interview question I had had during the first week of March. They asked me what I would do if there was a zombie apocalypse. What I told them, and what the first thing that came to mind was, that I would try to get back to my family as soon as possible. This isn’t a zombie apocalypse, but that anxiety and urgency were still there. Get across the border before it closes. Leave your friends and work behind. Say goodbyes swiftly. Make it easier for yourself.

March 17th is St. Patrick’s Day. My housemate and I had watched the first two of the original Star Wars movies. A friend had come by to pick-up a stereo. On the chalkboard door to my housemate’s bedroom we had listed the things we were going to do during the short quarantine we believed we were under. Smoke weed. Star Wars movie marathon. Play cards. I guess my housemate wiped it off after I left.

It didn’t take long for me to pack up all my stuff because I didn’t plan on being in Kingston for longer than three months. I went to bed afterwards. I thought back to the way that I felt when I witnessed a car crash one day in high school. My best friend was driving us. I think I slept three-hours the night before because of an assignment. A car coming out from a stop sign slipped on the ice and T-boned the left-turning car. I started crying immediately; my friend told me to call 9-1-1 and got out of the car to check on the drivers. When I called, I couldn’t tell them where we were, or what street we were on, even though we were a few blocks from my house. After we got to school I went to the nurse’s office and cried. I never wanted to feel like that again.

The day after I packed my things two of my best friends came over to take what alcohol and food I had left. It was embarrassing what I had stocked up for when I thought I was staying for longer. I was angry at myself for spending the money, and angry at my friends for taking it from me. I was mad that they got to stay, and sad that I had to leave them, and anxious to get home as soon as possible. They arrived at my house a few hours before my dad came, and I was angry at them as soon as they walked into the house. I wanted them to leave so that I could check the box off my to-do list. Saying goodbye to friends. I needed them gone because their presence in my house, such an anomaly on a Wednesday morning, just emphasized the irregularity of our lives. I barely spoke to them and hugged them goodbye much earlier than they anticipated. I didn’t care if I had hurt them because I was hurting all over, aching, needing them to be gone.

As soon as they left I cried. I started sobbing, huge, heaving, wracking sobs, that betrayed me to myself. My housemate sat by silently and handed me a box of tissues. It was so much easier for her to see me like this than the others. She and I were friends, and had spent so much time together, but she didn’t know me eight weeks earlier. While I cried I told her how scared I was that I was a carrier and was going to infect my mom, and how much I wanted to get home despite it. I cried for the anxiety that I was feeling towards everyone and everything, like if someone touched me I would probably crumble. Another friend stopped by and I steeled myself to her too. I loved these people but their presence at my door meant my reality was true.

The weather on the drive home with my dad was beautiful. One of the things that this pandemic has made me realize is that for all the things that humans pride themselves on controlling, the weather is something insurmountable. We are at its mercy, and although hundreds of thousands of people have died from this virus, the weather will never reflect our mood. If anything, this is a blessing, a reminder that ultimately life does not stop, that the rain does not pour because we are feeling sad, and the sun does not shine because we need the flowers to grow. We can take stock in its presence, and breathe these coincidences as if they were meant for us, and it can bring us joy, and hope, and sadness. But the weather will keep on changing, and so will we.

Two days after coming home, my dad and I flew down to South Carolina to drive my brother and his friend home. I have recently started having trouble with flying. I have flown all the time for a large part of my life, to many different countries around the world. But at some point a flight changed from a break in travel to a long-block in a journey from getting one place to another. I have started to feel an anxiety in the pit of my stomach, a different feeling than my normal one, probably something that I’d classify as dread. I am now tempted to sleep through the flights, and just go from one place to another without the excruciating in-between, without acknowledging the clouds and the large oceans and plots of land that they cover. Our flight to South Carolina reminded me of these feelings. These feelings kind of remind me of the present too. I open the paper and read the news everyday, with a sense of “Are we there yet?” But where is there? And who is we? And should yet, implying a closeness that is just out of reach, be in our vocabulary?

The drive back from South Carolina to Connecticut was filled with more urgency than I anticipated. My brother and his friend did not need to be dragged out of bed at eight o’clock in the morning. The drive-thru fried breakfast food was compulsory but felt like an exception to some unnamed rule of not stopping except for necessities. My dad and I drove together, and listened to podcasts, and looked out the window, but it was rimmed with the kind of dread that I felt on the airplane. If we didn’t get home fast enough, would we ever make it?

When I was driving into Connecticut, and my dad was half-asleep in the passenger seat, he told me how glad my mom will be when we are all home together. I told him I was happy, but nervous about being an unknown carrier of the virus. He got angry, saying that he was trying to unload his stress by talking with me. When we got home it was great, and we are together again, but it’s not as easy as I thought it would be.

I am struggling every day with some cognitive dissonance. I care so much about the world, and the people in it, but how can I say these things without working the same amount to ensure their own safety and happiness? But at the same time, how can I think about putting my family at risk by going further into the world?

Where is my place right now? Who am I meant to be during this time?

And still, the weather will keep changing, and tomorrow it may rain, or it will be sunny, and I’ll have no say in it.